

USA Owls swoop on Rugbyfest spoils

As if to bless the inaugural Tetley's Kowloon RFC Rugbyfest 10s the clouds parted and the sun poured down on the latest addition to the annual rugby madness which afflicts Hong Kong during the month of March.

With eager grins on their faces and boots in their bags, teams from the USA, England, Wales, Guam and Dubai jetted into Chek Lap Kok, beckoned by the warm invitation from Kowloon Rugby Club. The idea was to indulge in a day of "social" rugby, followed by an evening party and finally concluding with the spectacle of rugby at the Hong Kong Sevens.

The tournament draw was held in Delaney's where the clannish teams had their first opportunity to weigh up the assembled opposition and of course to quaff a few jet lag soothing ales! As the players mingled, the names were ceremonially plucked from the draw hat and the order of play determined for the following day. Maybe it was jet lag or the medicinal nature of the flowing beer, but many of the more determined entrants passed over the opportunity of some early zzz's to embark on some nocturnal sightseeing!

An immaculate So Kon Po pitch greeted the teams the following morning and after removing the Scottish National Squad from the playing area the tournament kicked off – only those short on sleep not quite appreciating the glorious sunshine!

As the pool games progressed a clear pecking order became established, with the New York Lions, Varsity Blues, Chepstow Blues and USA Owls making their intentions clear from the start, however the social nature of the tournament was most apparent, particularly with the strains of Ned Kelly's strolling Jazz band keeping spirits high.

As the light faded and the final pool matches were completed the floodlights signalled the start of the Cup semi-finals with the USA Owls taking on their North American rivals, the New York Lions, while the Varsity Blues took on the Chepstow Cavaliers. The Owls once again

showed their talons by securing their final berth with a 34-0 victory.

Chepstow did not find matters quite so straightforward as they edged out the Varsity Blues, however the one try advantage in the end saw them into the Cup final. The Watson's Water Bowl competition

The Silver Season

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pitched the Devil's Advocates (International Select Team) against the hosts in the form of the Kowloon Exiles, the Advocates pulling off a great victory.

The Costain-China Harbour Plate final saw other host team Headstrong Kowloon retain some of the silverware on offer with a hard fought victory over Guam Geckos, who will surely seek some revenge when Kowloon attend the Guam True Grit tournament next year.

All that remained was to see who would lift the Tetley's Rugbyfest 10s Cup for the first

time. Over an extended playing time of 10 minutes each way the USA Owls and the Chepstow Cavaliers slogged it out. Whilst the first half provided an even contest, illustrated by the fact that the Cavaliers became the first team to cross the Owls try line, it ultimately became a trial of strength and fitness as the Owls moved up a gear to deliver the killing blow of two quick tries taking an unassailable lead. In light of recent results, it is interesting to note that no southern hemisphere side has yet to win the Tetley's Cup!

The true success of Rugbyfest was evident at the post match party held at Grappa's Country in Central. Tired bodies were bussed to the venue where re-fuelling and rehydrating where the initial prime concerns.

Guests were treated to an after dinner speech from former England Captain Phil De Glanville under the compering and guidance of ex-Loonie Leighton Duley who then dished out the spoils on offer.

The "Player of the tournament" Trophy was awarded to 66-year young Martin Lewis who played in each of the Devil's Advocates fixtures. As Chris Welsh the Kowloon club secretary remarked "he embodied the complete enjoyment of our great game and the spirit of the tournament".

As the last of the merrymakers left the party it was left for the organisers to reflect on the plans and hopes for this new addition to the rugby calendar. "When we looked back at the original plan for Rugbyfest, to provide an opportunity for the travelling rugby fan to get his boots on and have a go, and then sit back and enjoy the remaining week of rugby.... I think we pulled it off!" confirmed Andy Treloar adding "many of the teams have been in touch with us since, expressing their enjoyment of the whole experience and their intention to return next year....fantastic!"

More on the Tetley's Rugbyfest 10s can be found on the Kowloon RFC website on www.kowloonrfc.com.hk. **RT**

By Clive Hammond

